

DAGESTAN

**Russian Hegemony and Islamic
Resistance in the North Caucasus**

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Armonk, New York
London, England

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1

Introduction

Where Mountains Rise

Vertical versus Horizontal

Shortly after beginning his first term in the spring of 2000, Russia's president Vladimir Putin embarked upon a program of government recentralization. The program was presented as a necessary antidote to constitutional, administrative, and security issues arising from the period of sometimes chaotic decentralization that began in the final years of the Soviet Union and extended through the administration of Boris Yeltsin. On September 13, 2004, President Putin dramatically advanced this agenda with his announcement of sweeping electoral reforms culminating in the centralized appointment of regional governors.

These proposals were presented by President Putin in response to the Beslan school tragedy, as a means for reducing corruption and increasing security throughout the Russian Federation. In fact, it appeared that these proposals had been long in the making, but their presentation as a response to a hostage crisis in the North Caucasus served to sharpen questions about their efficacy and propriety in connection with regional problems of extremism and terrorism.

It is plausible that Russian decentralization was carried too far in the 1990s. Certainly the corrupt and self-serving regimes that it produced in the North Caucasus did little to address chronic problems of economic stagnation, infrastructural decay, environmental degradation, infectious disease, and organized crime that together contributed to alienation, radicalism, and terrorism in the region. Hence, it appeared that President Putin was correct in his premise that the problems of this region required political transformation. Yet the diminished political access and local accountability that resulted from renewed centralization led to increased levels of corruption, alienation, radicalism, and terrorism in this volatile region.

Few would fault the Kremlin for attempting to reconcile the federal constitution with its local counterparts or deny that local potentates have contributed to Russian administrative and security problems. Yet in assessing tradeoffs among corruption, economic disparity, accountability, and security it may be helpful to consider Russia's recentralization within a broader historical framework.

Russia's program of recentralization is the latest chapter in a series of struggles that have constituted the history of the North Caucasus over at least the past two millennia, and it bears similarities to much that has preceded it.

Historically, conflicts in the North Caucasus have derived from two competing approaches to social organization. On the one hand, the alpine geography of this region has given rise to a particularist approach to social organization based upon traditional North Caucasian values of parochialism, kinship, egalitarianism, and self-determination. On the other hand, a series of universalist approaches have been imported by civilizations that have attempted to incorporate this region into systems of expansive socioeconomic organization, commonly described as empires. Due to the demands of their geographical expanse, each of these empires has involved hierarchical systems of administration incompatible with traditional North Caucasian values.

Ironically, the expansion of these empires horizontally, across the lowlands, necessitates their organization within vertical hierarchies of social control. Conversely, the vertical terrain of the mountains sustains the egalitarianism, self-determination, and horizontal social organization of societies localized within the alpine valleys. In other words, the vertical-hierarchical organization of these empires was necessary for their successful geographical expansion, but when that expansion brought them to the foothills of the Caucasus Mountains it rendered them fundamentally incompatible with the horizontally egalitarian values of the societies that it encountered therein. At an elementary level, the series of great conflicts¹ that historically have beset this region may be seen as involving systems of lowland social administration that were organized vertically-hierarchically in order to facilitate horizontal expansion, spreading successfully until they bumped up against incompatibly parochial and horizontally egalitarian systems, which were no less a product of their vertically alpine geography.

In the past two millennia, the region has been visited by Arab, Mongol, Persian, Ottoman, and Russian empires, among others. It must be emphasized that each of these empires brought a unique culture and organizational structure. Yet all of them involved similar contrasts to indigenous social structures, all of them encountered similar problems, and all of them produced accounts that described the local populations in similar terms.

The Arrival of Islam

The Islamic expansion reached the North Caucasus soon after it began in the seventh century. Mohammad died in 632, and by 642 Suraqa bin 'Amr had led a contingent of Arabs to the gates of Derbent, in what is now southern Dagestan. After rapidly overrunning the Persian Empire, the Arabs pushed

up the western shore of the Caspian Sea to the threshold of Eurasia. There they stood beneath the walls of Derbent, which span those three strategic kilometers that separate the eastern reach of the Caucasus Mountains from the Caspian shore. Recognizing the importance of the city to their northward expansion, and to virtually any other regional strategy, they proclaimed that the ancient city² had been established by the angel Gabriel, and declared its conquest to be divinely prescribed with divine absolution as a recompense for all who joined the struggle.³

Yet while they clearly recognized the strategic significance of the city, and while they had so recently overrun Persia, the Arab army proved incapable of controlling either Derbent or its environs. In 652, the Dagestanis decisively defeated the Arabs on the battlefield, and then rededicated themselves to their relentless and devastating raids against the Muslims. Though the Arabs periodically made punitive forays up the rugged slopes that they called “language mountain” as a homage to Dagestan’s linguistic heterogeneity, and though they eventually managed to convert a few local potentates, they found themselves incapable of securing their own boundaries, let alone deterring constant harassment from the highlanders.⁴ Ironically, the Eurasian antecedents of contemporary Russians were spared from Muslim conquest by the fierce resistance with which Dagestani parochialism met imperial expansion from the south. As Michael Reynolds puts it:

Dagestan, in short, proved to be a difficult place to rule: geographically isolated, topographically rugged, and unrelentingly hostile. The Arabs and their chroniclers repeatedly expressed exasperation with the warlike North Caucasian infidels. Suraqa bin Amr described the torment of fighting the mountaineers in verse, and al-Masudi’s angry description of a local Dagestani chieftain as a “host of robbers, brigands, and malefactors” hints at the Muslims’ frustrations.⁵

Though the Muslims finally took Derbent in 686, they were never able to control Dagestan’s interior. Yet if the Arabs never conquered Dagestan, they planted the seeds of its conversion when Derbent’s population gradually adopted Islam. In the hills and mountains outside the walls of Derbent, the Lezgins were among the first of the Dagestani groups to come into contact with Islam at the end of the seventh century. The tradition of Islamic mysticism known as Sufism appeared in Dagestan in the eighth century, at the early stages of its development. Al-Farabi⁶ and Al-Ghazali⁷ are often credited with the elements of Sufism, yet its principles were also elaborated in a manuscript titled “Raihan al-Hakaik va bustan ad-Dakaik”⁸ by an eleventh-century thinker from Derbent, known as el-Derbendy.

By this time Sufism was becoming the dominant form of Islam in Dagestan, which continued to nourish significant traditions of Sufi scholarship through the nineteenth century. Dagestan's localized social order and rugged terrain provided fertile ground for Sufism, which has sometimes shown antiestablishment tendencies. Followers of the Qadiri tariqah⁹ appeared in Dagestan in the eleventh century, while the Naqshbandi tariqah arrived from eastern Anatolia in the fifteenth century, acquiring adherents especially among the Avar, Dargin, and Kumyk ethnicities. The Naqshbandi tariqah has acquired contemporary prominence in Dagestan through the influence of Sheikh Sayid-Efendi Cherkeevskii, but the Shazilya tariqah is also represented.

The *tariqah* is the Sufi path to God. The term is also used to identify the brotherhood with which an adherent walks that path. Each of these brotherhoods consists of a *sheikh* (teacher) and his *murids* (disciples). While all Muslims are on a path toward God, to whom they will draw closer after death, Sufism offers a mystical path toward a living union with God through the power of suffering and love. Sufis do not focus upon legalistic praxis, which they deem the "outward" manifestations of Islam. Rather, they are concerned with the "inner" meaning of the sacred texts (Koran and hadith). As a result, many orthodox/legalistic or puritanical believers have accused the Sufis of not being Muslims at all.

By the eleventh century, Derbent had become a center of Sufi practice at the northern boundary of the Muslim world. There locals were educated as *gazi* or holy warriors, and dispatched toward the highland heart of Dagestan on military marches that aimed to bring Islam to the fierce mountaineers. Because of the ceaseless resistance that the latter encountered from the locals, the spread of Islam from Derbent to central Dagestan was measured in centuries. Indeed, the indigenous Muslims of Derbent were no less beleaguered than the Arabs. In 971, for example, Christian attackers from Sarir, who may have been the ancestors of the modern Avars, overran Derbent's Muslim defenders.¹⁰ Derbent's Muslim *amir* was occasionally driven to seek military support from the northern Slavs who were raiding Dagestan's Caspian coast from the tenth century on.¹¹

Yet by the fourteenth century, Islam had reached Dagestan's largest ethnic group, the Avars. By the end of the fifteenth century, most Dagestanis had subscribed to the Shafi'i *madhab* or school of Sunni Islam.¹² Among Dagestan's numerous ethnic groups, Islam struck its deepest chords among the Avars, Dargins, and Kumyks.¹³ In the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, Islam spread to the Chechens and Ingushis, though it was not well established among these Vainakh peoples until the eighteenth century. Yet if the Vainakhs were among the region's youngest Muslims, they were also among its most zealous.

The Arabs may have failed to conquer Dagestan in the name of Allah, but Allah eventually triumphed over the next 1,000 years. And if the Dagestanis

would not yield to the Arabs' imperial organization, they eventually learned to wield the faith of the Arabs as a weapon against another imperial expansion that would impinge upon them from the north at the end of that millennium. Reynolds concludes that:

From the records left by the Arabs, we can already identify a number of factors that have distinguished the dynamics of the conflict in the Caucasus ever since. The first is the strategic nature of the region as a gateway between the Near East and the Eurasian steppes. The second is the rugged nature of its topography, which impeded the maneuver, command, and control of large fighting forces. Third, and perhaps most significant, is the equally rugged and fierce nature of the region's inhabitants. These latter two factors combined to exact a forbidding cost upon every power that has attempted to subdue the North Caucasus. The Arabs, who had overrun the Persian Empire in a mere ten years and would go on to phenomenal conquests elsewhere, were stunned by the truculence of the mountaineers. Their propensity for raids and banditry further infuriated the original Muslims. Finally, the linguistic and ethnic complexity of the region also impressed the Arabs. All of these traits would impress the later, non-Muslim conquerors as well.¹⁴

A History of Imperial Failures

In the thirteenth century, the Mongols arrived on the next wave of imperial expansion to strike the Caucasus. They swept down from the northeast along the Caspian shore, and occupied Derbent in 1233. Yet the Mongols had no more success than the Arabs in subduing the Dagestani highlanders, who seemed to have regarded these newest invaders essentially as "fresh meat." Eventually, the Mongols were compelled to pay tributes in order to stop the mountaineers from raiding them.¹⁵

Timurlenk (Tamerlane) occupied Dagestan in 1395–96; yet he moved on to the southern side of the mountains without establishing a lasting presence in the North Caucasus. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the Ottoman and Safavid empires made incursions into the northeast Caucasus without consolidating their control. Dagestani leaders successfully played the Ottomans against the Safavids, and occasionally even the Russians, in order to preserve a measure of independence.

Beginning in the eighteenth century, the Safavids met growing resistance in Dagestan. When a local Muslim leader named Hadji-Daud announced that he had been called by Allah to liberate Dagestan's Sunni population from southern Shiite oppression, he won support from Surhai-Khan, the sovereign of Kazi-Kumukh, as well as from Akhmed-Khan of Kaitag. In 1712 Surhai-Khan liber-

ated the town of Shamakhi from the Safavid Persians. By 1721, this movement succeeded in expelling the Persians from Dagestan and northern Azerbaijan.

After he was encouraged by military successes elsewhere in his southern empire, the Persian ruler Nadir Shah vowed to reestablish the Persian presence in Dagestan in 1742. Yet just three years later, he too was forced to withdraw from Dagestan, and died soon after. Relentlessly, the Dagestanis resumed their raids into Safavid territory. As Reynolds remarks:

The patterns first observed during the Arab invasions of the region thus repeated themselves in the period leading up to the Russian conquest. The mountaineers vigorously opposed all attempts by outsiders to impose their rule and proved to be indomitable . . . the difficult terrain, the mountaineers' pugnacity, and the lack of a central government—put a decisive stamp on the form of conflict in the North Caucasus. . . . The geography, in addition to sheltering the mountaineers from outside rule by raising the costs and lowering the benefits of intervention, also fostered the development of a culture that prized such attributes as athletic prowess, physical courage, and self-reliance; that is, martial virtues.¹⁶

While geographical theories of cultural determinism are often controversial, the influence of the rugged terrain upon regional character types is mentioned anecdotally by the people of this region, and has figured historically in the accounts of outside observers. For example, the Ottoman historian Ahmed Cevdet Pasha connected the region's topography to the egalitarian traditions of its natives in his conclusion that: "Since their land is steep and difficult, they do not submit to a government."¹⁷ At the beginning of the twentieth century, John Baddeley wrote that, "The people of the Caucasus owe it not only their salient characteristics, but their very existence. It may be said without exaggeration that the mountains made the men."¹⁸ Reynolds remarks that the geographical obstacles of the region were compounded by their cultural counterparts, rendering the mountaineers

allergic to central control. These same factors acted to block local sovereigns as much as outside hegemony from uniting and centralizing the region. Because ad-hoc coalitions of local leaders proved sufficient for withstanding outside invasions, up until the nineteenth century there was neither much incentive nor a sociocultural basis for the formation of a state or other political-administrative structure that would embrace the North Caucasus as a whole.¹⁹

Nevertheless, Reynolds observes that Sunni Islam provided the North Caucasus with a "conceptual foundation for nation building." In contrast with

some world religions, for example, Buddhism or Christianity, Sunni Islam is geared intrinsically toward political activity. Indeed, it would be misleading to suggest that Islam joins theology with politics, for in Islam these are not two distinct spheres of life.²⁰ This is because the Prophet Mohammed was, among many other things, a military and political leader.²¹ He sought to offer his followers a comprehensive set of guidelines for most aspects of human life, including political affairs. For centuries, his life has been taken as a model for military and political leadership. This model was further developed by a series of Islamic political philosophers, including Al-Farabi (870–950), Avicenna (930–1037), Ibn Bajja (d. 1138), and Ibn Tufayl (d. 1185). Eldest among Russia's Muslim regions, Dagestan has contributed to Islamic thought through the work of Sufi writers such as Magomed Abu Bakr ad-Derbendi (early eleventh century), Abu Khamid al-Ghazali (1059–1111), and Magomed Yaragsky (d. 1839).

Venturing beyond more restrictive conceptions of theological doctrine, the Sunni faith draws upon the divinely mandated law, the *sharia*, which prescribes social and political relations as spiritual mandates comparable to the individual's ritual obligations to God. Sharia offers a comprehensive, and often codified, body of social laws that it derives from Koran and the hadiths (anthologies based upon Mohammad's statements and deeds). At the core of sharia is the recognition that its laws depend upon enforcement from *dawla*, or the state. Political philosophy and jurisprudence are integral elements in the study of classical Islam.

Confrontation and Compromise Among Competing Forms of Social Organization

In recent periods, two expansive social organizations have competed for control of the North Caucasus: Russian and Islamist. Because each has encountered opposition from traditional local structures, it is useful to consider three alternative forms of social organization as having joined in competition for preeminence in the North Caucasus. First, there have been the local systems of parochialism, egalitarianism, and self-determination that are traditional to North Caucasian societies. While these vary dramatically among themselves,²² they have proved, in varying degrees, resistant to the hierarchical forms of organization that a long series of empires have attempted to impose upon them. Second, there has been the hierarchical system of dominance and subordination that is more or less traditional to Russian society.²³ Third, there have been systems of expansionist absolutism advocated by Islamist extremists. Variations of these three systems—traditional-local, Russian, and expansionist Islamist—have competed on and off in the North Caucasus for the past 200 years.

During these years there have been periods in which each of these principles was in ascendance, and periods in which each was in decline. There were periods in which each system was advanced by its proponents in stark opposition to the others, and periods of relative compromise. This spirit of compromise was illustrated perhaps most stunningly when the Dagestani highlanders forced the Mongols to pay them tribute. But a more important instance occurred in the latter half of the nineteenth century when the Russian imperial administration in Dagestan accepted traditional village law (*adat*) and political organization, along with village-based Islamic functionaries, and played their parochialism against efforts by some Islamic leaders to organize another wave of expansive popular resistance.

By contrast, the Soviet Union offered North Caucasians different forms of compromise. On the one hand, the Soviet Union persecuted Islam, and imposed a stark system of hierarchy and domination in keeping with Russian traditions. Yet at the same time, Soviet collectivism was roughly concordant with traditional highland village life. Moreover, Stalin's ethnic policies paid lip service to local traditions of kinship and parochialism by carving the region into a series of titular republics, wherein linguistic and cultural distinctions were subsequently reified. In the post-Stalin period, the Soviet Union offered North Caucasians tangible benefits in terms of security and economic development.

Political stability in the North Caucasus has been strengthened by such periods of relative compromise. On the other hand, periods of stark opposition among any of these three social systems have tended to undermine regional stability. Have these oppositions been heightened by Moscow's efforts to re-centralize political control through the assertion of a hierarchically organized political system in place of parochial democratic structures? In the absence of tangible improvements in local security and economic development, are these efforts more likely to precipitate or to prevent the further destabilization of the region?

In the face of globalizing pressures of the twenty-first century, most local residents realize that North Caucasian parochialism is not sustainable. Hence, the questions are, which of the two competing approaches to a more expansive mode of social organization will eventually consolidate the region, and what kind of terms will that system reach with the traditional cultural and economic requirements of the region?

The Russian system has had advantages including: (1) political inertia resulting from current Russian control; (2) the legacy of Soviet security and economic benefits; (3) unattractive features of proximate states in the South Caucasus; (4) the Yeltsin administration's willingness to compromise with local sociopolitical structures. For example, from 1994 to 2003,²⁴ the Russian

Federation accommodated Dagestan's uniquely democratic political system, despite the fact that the latter boasted a distinctive ethnic electoral system and the federation's only executive that was either collegial in its nature²⁵ or indirectly elected.²⁶ Each of these singularities was inspired by the requirements of Dagestan's ethnic heterogeneity and the traditional sociopolitical structures to which it has given rise.²⁷ Similarly, both the Yeltsin and Putin administrations proved willing to compromise and cooperate with leaders of the region's traditional Sufi Islam in their struggles with a strain of expansionist, Islamist extremism known locally as "Wahhabism." Examples of compromise are the certification of the Islamic Party of Russia,²⁸ and Putin's application for Russian membership in the Organization of the Islamic Conference. Examples of cooperation are Putin's June 2000 appointment of Mufti Akhmad-Khadji Kadyrov to administrative leadership of Chechnya,²⁹ and political authorizations extended to the Spiritual Directorate of the Muslims of Dagestan.³⁰

These are precisely the sorts of compromises from which the region's Wahhabis have been prevented by their absolutist ideology. Wahhabism is an expansive mode of social organization whose adherents seek to establish an Islamic state in the North Caucasus. Hence it can achieve its ideological objectives only insofar as it overcomes both the Russian mode of social organization and the traditionally parochial societies of the region. Thus far Wahhabism has proved unprepared to compromise with either of these. Moreover, since Wahhabis seek to establish an expansive Islamic state in the North Caucasus, they would require the region to divorce itself from existing nation states in a manner that is unlikely to provide economic or security benefits to local residents. Finally, the austere tenets of Wahhabism are incompatible with the moderate practices of the region's traditional Sufi Islam,³¹ and have been fiercely rejected by overwhelming majorities of local residents.³² For all of these reasons, Wahhabism has been regarded as an unattractive alternative by most North Caucasians, and the Russian system therefore should not have had great difficulty in consolidating its control over the region by means of moderate compromises with the traditional requirements of local communities.

Hence, it seems surprising that Moscow adopted a much less compromising political strategy after Putin rose to power. Since the spring of 2000, Moscow's program of administrative recentralization has been gradually shifting the political balance of the region in a manner that seems to be ultimately less conducive to Russian management. This is because it has undermined previous political compromises without offering widespread economic benefits or tangible security improvements. On the contrary, there is a general sense in the region that security has deteriorated. Indeed, the strategy of Wahhabi leaders has seemed, at times, to advertise this point by way of periodic terrorist

atrocities as well as by targeting government and law enforcement officials for assassination.

Meanwhile wealth has become more concentrated as genuine opportunities for legitimate economic advancement have diminished. To be sure, Moscow has been heavily subsidizing the republics of this region. Dagestan, for example, has regularly received more than 80 percent of its budget from the federal center, while Ingushetia has received in excess of 85 percent. Yet federal mandates have required that some of this money be allocated for material purchases from Moscow suppliers, and too much of the remainder has lined the pockets of a diminishing number of political elites in the south. Overall, corruption and economic disparity have increased in the North Caucasus, while political access and local accountability have narrowed. Gradually, the region has seen the development of hierarchies of power and subordination that resemble those of Russian colonial domination in the early nineteenth century, although with local elites occupying rungs that were previously held by Russian administrators.

During the period of conquest, early Russian colonialism ignored the region's traditional egalitarianism in order to empower local potentates as administrative vassals. The result was increasing economic disparities, corruption, and political repression. Those conditions inspired the murid movement in Dagestan, which later spread to Chechnya. The murid movement drew upon the structure of local tariqah Islam with its groups of students (murids) and their Islamic teachers (sheikhs). Muridism was a political ideology devised in opposition to the Russian colonial hierarchy, and drawing upon Islamic teachings such as: "A true Muslim can neither subordinate, nor be subordinated to, another man."

In other words, when the hierarchical and expansionist features of Russian colonialism became incompatible with local traditions, the Dagestanis turned to a political interpretation of Islam that they devised as a counterweight, culminating in twenty-eight years of brutal warfare from 1831 to 1859. In order to sustain their struggle against the Russian empire, murid leaders such as Imam Shamil had to wage a simultaneous war against the parochialism of the local villages and their traditional codes of law, known as *adat*. Shamil sought to unite all of the villages of the northeast Caucasus in one expansive imamate under the rule of Islamic sharia.

Thus in the early nineteenth century, the traditional Russian system of hierarchy and domination drove many Dagestanis and Chechens toward an Islamist response. However, the murid ideology that they devised was also expansionist and therefore also at odds with the traditional parochialism of the region. This contributed to its defeat in 1859, after which a series of tsarist, Soviet, and democratic administrations found various means of compensating, or compromising with, local sociopolitical needs.

The period that began with the Dubrovka Theater hostage crisis in Moscow in October 2002 and culminated in the Beslan school hostage crisis in North Ossetia in September 2004 may be viewed as a watershed in the North Caucasus. The intervening months saw a series of democratic setbacks in the region, including the manipulation of Chechnya's constitutional referendum, the manipulation of the Chechen presidential election, the imposition of a new constitution upon Dagestan, the assassination of Chechnya's president, and the manipulation of a second Chechen presidential election. Meanwhile Ingushetia was gradually destabilized after the Kremlin instigated the withdrawal of its popular president, Ruslan Aushev, and his replacement by Murat Zyazikov, a former officer of the Russian Federal Security Service, who sought to compensate for his political weakness by means of brutal repression.

Did the destabilization of Ingushetia foreshadow events in neighboring republics following the centralized appointment of local governors? Ironically, Moscow's program of recentralization seems to have contributed to precisely those problems in the North Caucasus that it was advertised as preventing.

If Moscow had stimulated local economies while playing the neutral arbiter among the region's relentless political rivalries it might have earned the enduring loyalty of the local peoples. If, instead of umpire, it prefers to play empire, then it may reap their resentment. Might Moscow have been wiser to support economic development together with democratic procedures in the North Caucasus? In order to answer these questions it will be helpful to take a closer look at the complex history of confrontation and compromise among the three systems of social organization that have competed for this region over the past two centuries.

2

Murids and Tsars

Islamic Ideology as an Antidote to Russian Colonialism

In the mid-sixteenth century, Tsar Ivan the Terrible established alliances in Dagestan and Kabarda with local chieftains who sought to balance Ottoman and Persian influences in the region. At the end of that century, the first Russian fort was raised where Dagestan's Sulak River meets the Caspian Sea.¹ In 1722 Peter I's Caspian campaign became Russia's first direct military intervention in Dagestan, though it eventually furthered the interests of Persia. In his manifesto dated June 15 of that year, Peter declared that the "Russian Army joined our friend, the Iranian Shah Hussein, against the Dagestanis, Hadji-Daud and Surkhai-Khan, that rose against their sovereign" and raided Russian merchants. A large Russian army marched down the west Caspian corridor, seizing Derbent and its environs. At about the same time, Peter furthered Russian incursions into northern Dagestan by founding the Russian city of Kizliar.² Yet difficulties in other regions of Peter's far-flung empire forced the withdrawal of Russian troops, and by 1732 Russia had ceded Dagestan to Persia.

By the latter half of the eighteenth century, Russia was consolidating its control of the Stavropol region, and initiating military incursions southward toward the mountains. Beginning in the 1760s, Russia expanded its presence in the region with a chain of fortresses that eventually stretched across the plains of the North Caucasus and that served as the origin for several contemporary cities and towns.³ This Russian presence was anchored with the construction of a military outpost at Mozdok (now in North Ossetia) in 1763, followed in 1790, by the fortress of Vladikavkaz.⁴ As early as the 1780s, Catherine the Great initiated expansionist warfare against North Caucasian clans.⁵ In 1806, Russia annexed Kabarda and Derbent, and Ossetian leaders recognized Russian control. In 1818, Russian fortifications were established in Grozny and Nalchik, and by 1844 a fortress had been erected at Petrovsk, now known as Makhachkala. This chain of Russian forts, running east and west along the base of the mountains, precipitated a century of conflict with the highlanders of the region.

In addition to this military challenge, Russian expansionism posed a yet more serious demographic threat, as the flow of settlers southward disrupted the local economy and drove the local population further upward into less arable highland territories.⁶ As early as the seventeenth century, Christian Cossacks had begun to settle along the Terek River, and congregated in the town of Kizliar in northern Dagestan.⁷ Skillfully playing the Cossacks against the Muslim natives, St. Petersburg's policies for undermining Islam and converting its subjects to Russian Orthodox Christianity "added a cultural and spiritual dimension to the threat."⁸

These new incursions mobilized the diverse societies of the North Caucasus in a variety of ways. In the northwestern Caucasus, the Circassian tribes sought closer alliances with one another, while also striving to play the Ottomans against the Russians.⁹ Resistance was largely passive in Kabarda and northern Dagestan, but the northeastern highland clans of Chechnya and Dagestan began to organize a fierce Islamic resistance. In 1783, the same year Russia annexed the Crimea, a Chechen religious leader known as Sheikh Mansur Ushurma emerged. Proclaiming the unity of the highland clans, Mansur called upon them to participate in a jihad against the Russians. He relied on religious as well as political leaders from throughout the region, and evidently tapped into Sufi networks, in order to gather a sufficiently large force to wage devastating guerilla attacks that inflicted several defeats upon the Russians. While there are various claims regarding the extent of Mansur's Sufi connections, and though he was without widespread support in Dagestan,¹⁰ there is no question that Mansur's organizational, as well as his tactical, innovations were an important legacy to subsequent Islamic resistance in the region. In the end, Mansur was captured by the Russians, and died a prisoner in the Shlisselburg fortress in 1791.¹¹

In 1796, Russian forces occupied Derbent, and by 1803, the Avarian Khanate voluntarily submitted to Russian rule. Yet it was another decade before Russia formally acquired Dagestan through its Gulistan Treaty with Persia in 1813. During the next fifty years, it devoted much of its military resources to its efforts to establish control of the region. By 1818 there was a widespread revolt against the ruthless tactics of the Russian Commander in the Caucasus, General Aleksey Petrovich Yermolov. Against entire populations, Yermolov waged a form of total warfare with tactics that included mass deportations, scorched earth, and mass starvation. For episodes that might be characterized as "genocidal" today, he was criticized by his contemporaries, and even cautioned by the tsars Alexander I and Nicholas I. Yet he notoriously responded to this criticism with the claim that "Gentleness in the eyes of Asiatics is a sign of weakness, and out of pure humanity I am inexorably severe."¹²

Though their severity was barely diminished, the efficacy of Yermolov's

destructive tactics was partially mitigated by structural peculiarities that he encountered in the North Caucasus at the micro, as well as the macro, level. At the micro level, Yermolov's tactic of razing highland villages to the ground was rendered somewhat less devastating by the Chechen propensity for wooden dwellings, which facilitated the reconstruction of their villages. The Dagestani preference for stone construction was a relative liability.¹³ More important, at the regional level, the decentralized nature of highland life substantially undermined the efficacy of Yermolov's methods. Because of the traditionally parochial nature of highland life, the region was fragmented into a mosaic of village-states, which had to be conquered one at a time. As was the case in their resistance to all preceding empires, the decentralized nature of North Caucasian life, itself a product of the mountains, helped the local peoples to resist imperial conquest.

The difficulties that Yermolov faced as a result of the region's traditional sociopolitical fragmentation were especially significant in the case of the Chechens, who lacked any overarching political structure. Chechen society was organized according to a seven-tiered kinship structure, centering on clans (*teips*) that in turn composed larger federations (*tuhums*).¹⁴ The only unifying body that the Chechens recognized was the Mekh Kel, an egalitarian assembly of clan leaders, which exercised limited authority in cases where unanimity was lacking.¹⁵ In Chechnya, Islamic zealotry went hand in hand with an egalitarianism that recognized neither class distinctions nor aristocratic privilege. As Reynolds puts it:

Every Chechen male was an *uzden*, or "freeman." It is only a slight exaggeration to say that every Chechen was in effect free to act as he saw fit within the bounds of the Chechen code of behavior, which admired courage and resistance as much as it disdained weakness and submission. Yermolov's strategy of intimidation was far less effective against such a decentralized and resilient society.¹⁶

Yet if the traditional fragmentation of Chechen society was an obstacle to Russian expansion, elsewhere in the region the opposite was the case. In their effort to establish their power, Russian administrators exploited the ethnic diversity of the region through a strategy of "divide and rule." Relatively unified groups, such as the Circassians, were subdivided among a number of artificial ethnicities that stressed previously subsidiary ethnolinguistic distinctions. Other Russian policies favored Christians in Armenia, Georgia, and Ossetia over the region's Islamic population, and settled Cossacks in the territories of numerous ethnic groups. The Transcaucasus fell under Russian control long before the Eastern Caucasus had been subdued.

Russia's nineteenth century struggle to control the North Caucasus took the form of a military administration that combined autocracy with the traditional local influences of Islam and adat, that is, local customary law. It produced a form of government that was at once bureaucratic in its form and arbitrary in its policies. Bureaucratic appointees, who often were imported from Christian areas of the Caucasus, especially Georgia and Armenia, arrived at relations of patronage with members of the local "aristocracy."

In Dagestan, there were efforts to establish the traditionally hierarchical power structures that had enabled centuries of Russian expansion. Hence the tsarist administrations relied upon the local "aristocracy," though the social status of this group differed substantially from its Russian counterpart. The confiscation of lands for the imperial treasury was followed by distributions of those same lands to local elites who agreed to cooperate with the new rulers. This imposition of the Russian model of sociopolitical organization led, on the one hand, to the elevation of a pseudo-aristocracy of loyal local elites, and, on the other hand, to the enslavement of the formerly free *djamaat*, or village, populations, who were reduced to the misery of forced labor.

These practices undermined traditional systems of sociopolitical relations among the local population. The result looked less like the construction of a new social system than the demoralization of the old. Formerly democratic highland societies degenerated into little tyrannies, in which arbitrary power was propped up by the strength of the Russian military. Ordinary citizens had to choose between submission to these petty tyrannies and armed resistance. This resistance drew upon a potent combination of Islamic and clan-based solidarity, together with the self-reliant individualism and egalitarianism that traditionally characterized "free societies" in the area. In the Northeast Caucasus it was neither national groups nor village chiefs that organized the fight against Russian expansion. Rather it was tribal federations fighting under a novel variant of Islamic organization known as muridism, a religious ideology of political resistance based upon Sufi traditions.

Thus the pressures of colonialism led to the formulation of a new Sufi ideology of liberation and self-determination. The murid movement depended upon the traditional organization of mystical Sufi brotherhoods, or *tariqahs*, that consisted of *murids*, or students, around an Islamic teacher, or *sheikh*. Muridism initially emerged within the Naqshbandi Sufi brotherhood, where it appeared as a spiritual response of Dagestan's formerly free *djamaat* population to the critical changes in the sociocultural conditions of life, inspired by the divisive politics and the harsh administration of the tsar's occupation officials. This movement had the goal of spiritual purification of Muslims from the imposition of a foreign religion, the perceived impurities of the new society, and the inequities of the new aristocratic order.¹⁷

These political goals were expressed in the concept of *gazavat*, or war of liberation. This doctrine was propounded by Mullah Magomed from the Yaragi djamaat of southern Dagestan after he became the highest Sheikh-Murshid of the Naqshbandi brotherhood. Magomed Yaragsky's early statements were exclusively moral admonitions and appeals. The erosion of traditional Dagestani norms and values led him to preach a strong spiritual response. Gradually, the sheikh developed a doctrine that evoked the spiritual aspirations and social demands of the djamaat population.

At the basis of his teaching was the concept of the freedom of a Muslim from subordination to anyone. His main idea was that "A Muslim cannot be a slave, or anybody's subject; he should not pay taxes; and there should be equality among Muslims."¹⁸ The conclusion that followed was that Dagestanis who called themselves Muslims were not in fact such, since they had been subordinated by local rulers and oppressed by foreigners. It made no difference that the former subjugation was to Muslims and the latter was to Christians. Yaragsky's admonition simply implied that the true Muslim was free from oppression in all forms, and that the unfaithful were those who either oppressed or suffered oppression. Conversely, a Christian who lived freely and did not oppress another man was not to be considered an enemy of the Muslims.

This approach demanded a revision of one of the Pillars of Islam, namely *zakat*, or mandatory charity. The word literally means "purification," since it was believed that a tithe given for those in need purifies and legitimizes material prosperity. Zakat contributions are based upon income from different kinds of profit and property. Yet in the Dagestani practice of those years, *zakat* had become a mandatory tax that not only was used for its intended purpose but also was misappropriated by those who regulated its collection and distribution, including mullahs, kadis or judges, and other clerics.

Based on his conviction that "a Muslim is a free man and should not pay taxes to anyone," Magomed Yaragsky rejected customary practices for the distribution of *zakat*. He cited passages from the Koran such as the following: "If you give charity openly, this is good, but if you secretly help the poor it is better for you, and it covers all of your bad deeds."¹⁹ According to Magomed Yaragsky, passages such as this implied that *zakat* should not be a mandatory tax that one man pays to another, but rather the duty of a free man to his God, serving exclusively to support the poor, and others in need. Following from this view, the sheikh decided to refuse the portion of the *zakat* that his djamaat customarily dedicated for his personal allowance. He declined his traditional remuneration by way of a penance before the people of his village that also affirmed his new ideology:

I am very sinful before Allah and the Prophet. Until now I understood neither Allah's will, nor the Prophet's predictions. Only by the mercy of the Most High have my eyes now been opened . . . I used the fruit of your fields, and was enriching myself at your expense, but a sheik should not take even a tenth of your property, and a judge should take only what Allah promised him for his service. I did not observe these Commandments, and now my conscience accuses me. I wish to redeem my guilt, and beg for forgiveness from Allah and you, and return everything that I previously took from you. Come here: all my possessions should become yours! Take them and divide them among yourselves.²⁰

The sacrifices and insights of the Sheikh of Yaragi showed the way (*tariqah*) for those who sought to become true Muslims, the way that was known as *gazavat*. On the one hand, *gazavat* indicated a war of liberation from oppression. Yet, as used at Yaragi at the time, *gazavat* was neither a war that intended to bring the faith to pagans nor an attack on infidels; it was not *jihād*, or holy war. Rather *gazavat* was the zeal of a Muslim on his way to Allah.²¹ As proclaimed by Magomed of Yaragi, *gazavat* was rebellion against oppression, whether the source of oppression was the local customs, or the local "aristocracy," or the soldiers and bureaucrats that served the tsar.²²

This interpretation of Islam was criticized, at that time, by some well-known Dagestani *ulema*, including Barka-kadi of Akushi and Said of Arakani Mirza-Ali.²³ Yet whether or not the teachings of Magomed of Yaragi were consistent with *tariqah* traditions, the organization of his adherents was in accord with the Sufi model of the *tariqah* brotherhood (*taifa*), consisting of a union of murids (students, apprentices, disciples) around their *murshid* (teacher, sheikh). In the end, it was not the scholarly esoterica, but rather the political significance of the new ideological approach that defined its social response. In his notes "On the Beginning and Development of *Muridism* or Spiritual Muslim War in Dagestan in 1823–1834," K.I. Prushanovsky, the captain of the General Staff of the Russian Army, described the effect of Magomed Yaragsky's penance upon the surrounding populations:

Since then the doors of the Mosques were rarely closed; men and women, even children, crowded in the Temples of the Prophet, prayed to God, cried, and promised not to commit sins. The word about Mullah Magomed was spread across the whole of Dagestan, and Dagestanis started flocking to the village of Yaragi from every corner; they were looking for his blessing, sworn to follow his teaching, admit him as their Murshid, and declare themselves as his Murids.²⁴

In the Kurinskii khanate, where the village of Yaragi was located, there soon began ritual, mystical initiations of children involving symbolic wooden swords marked with admonitions, such as “Muslims! Gazavat! Gazavat!” In other parts of Dagestan, especially Avaria, the followers of Yaragsky’s teachings brandished real weapons.

In 1824, Kazi-Magomed of Gimri, with the approval of his sheikh, Magomed Yaragsky, was elected *imam* (that is, military and political leader of Muslims) and declared gazavat. His success in the struggle against local khans, or aristocrats, and Russian garrisons laid a strong foundation for the new supra-djamaat, or imamate, a united, political organization of mountaineers. After Kazi-Magomed’s death in battle against the Russian army in 1832, Gamzat-bek was declared imam. He was followed, in 1834, by Shamil, whose twenty-five-year war with the Russian empire attracted international attention.²⁵

The movement of muridism was emerging as a moral response to the degradation of the sociopolitical basis of djamaat society under external pressure from the empire to the north. Yet its organized opposition to those external pressures soon culminated in expansionist efforts to unite Muslims throughout Dagestan with those of Chechnya. In turn, the efforts to achieve this unification implied an internal struggle against not only the presumptions of the local aristocrats but also the particularism of the djamaats, which fractured Dagestan into hundreds of little states.

The struggle of the murids to overcome the djamaats soon became a struggle against the customary law, or *adat*, upon which each djamaat was based. Ironically, before the rise of muridism, the civil laws of the djamaats were not regarded as *adat*, which is to say that they were not regarded as being opposed to sharia. Rather they were considered to be consistent with sharia.²⁶ Sharia jurisprudence permits the approval of laws that correspond to the demands of conditions and circumstances where they are made.²⁷

The redefinition of djamaat laws as *adat*, or as something opposed to sharia, is an ideological innovation dating only from the beginning of the nineteenth century, when it was the view adopted by the emerging political-religious movement, muridism. It was tantamount to a redefinition of the djamaat as being contrary to Islam. In the course of organizing a North Caucasian resistance to Russian conquest, murid leaders also declared war against the independent mountain “republics” and “principalities” in order to unite all Muslims under the banner of purified Islam. Essentially, the war against *adat* on behalf of sharia meant a rejection of the constitutions of the djamaats with a view toward the unification of the imamate.²⁸

No sooner had the Russians begun to contain traditional forms of Caucasian resistance than their hierarchical administrative methods gave rise to the

murids. But, while the murid movement arose in opposition to the external pressures of Russian colonialism, it quickly embarked upon an effort to transform the internal structure of North Caucasian society. This was because the murids could mount an effective opposition to the Russian empire only by uniting the Muslims of Dagestan and Chechnya. Thus, in their efforts to resist the Russians, the murids were compelled to wage war against traditional North Caucasian social structures, for there was no other way for them to expand and strengthen their mode of Islamic organization. Yet this required a transcendence of the particularism inherent in Dagestan's traditional djamaats, or village states, as well as in the traditional Chechen kinship structures. Hence, in order to wage their twenty-eight-year war against Russia, the murids also waged war upon the local djamaats, seeking to replace their customary law, or adat, with a more restricted understanding of Islamic sharia law.

Through its own revealing dialectic, the murid resistance to Russian domination that was initiated in the name of traditional North Caucasian values of equality and self-determination soon became a struggle against traditional North Caucasian parochialism. The same political fragmentation that had long underpinned Caucasian resistance to imperial domination was a problem for the murid approach to social organization no less than it was for the Russians. For millennia, traditional North Caucasian social structures had resisted imperial expansion. Yet with the rise of muridism in the nineteenth century, the North Caucasus saw a struggle between three competing models of social organization: traditional, Islamist, and Russian. By the middle of that century, the traditionally particularistic social structures of the Northeast Caucasus were under assault from both Russian and Islamic modes of expansionism.

The Repression of the Islamic Leadership Under Military Rule

Further ironies followed the surrender of Shamil in 1859. Shamil's political campaign against the djamaats was brought to a close when the tsarist administration created the "Dagestani Oblast of the Russian Empire." Yet, at the same time, his religious campaign was defeated when, as a counterweight to muridism, Russian administrators founded the new province on the traditions of the djamaats with an emphasis upon adat. Sharia was to be strictly limited, while the Sufi brotherhoods were subsequently persecuted. This system of government was presented as a "military-people's administration." Because the administration was "military," Russian civil laws did not apply in Dagestan. A limited form of adat was preserved within the internal life of the djamaats, and sharia was still used to determine relations between husband and wife, parents and children, and cases involving stealing or cheating that did not exceed fifty rubles.

The regime in the djamaats remained much as it had been prior to Shamil, except that the councils of “village elders” and “village judges” were appointed by the military administration. Clerics were removed from power but kadis became members of the courts. They served as consultants on issues of Islamic justice, maintained records, and managed the exclusively religious affairs of the djamaats. Village assemblies were also allowed, but they were deprived of any real power or significance. The authors of a text dated April 26, 1868, and titled “The State of Agricultural Management in Dagestan,” explained these concessions as an “unwillingness to create opposition” to Russian administrative power among the religious leadership of the djamaats. They wrote:

Thus, adats, and the djamaat administrations that are based upon them, serve us as a firm foundation in the approaching lengthy and covert fight with the Islamic clerics for influence over these people. The clerics will not remain indifferent to the fact that their influence is weakening, mainly due to the loss of their right to judge and prosecute.²⁹

Russia’s conquest of the North Caucasus had cost the lives of 20,000 of its soldiers. More than 60,000 had been wounded and 6,000 had become captives. After the war, Russia’s presence in the region could be sustained only at the cost of a quarter of its imperial budget. The burden of these costs deterred the Russian military administration from any further attempt at interference with existing, economic, social, and legal systems. Dagestan saw no further attempt at “grand agrarian colonization.”³⁰

Unlike Russia’s initial attempt, in the early 1800s, at a more strictly hierarchical colonial organization that ignored local traditions, Russia’s late nineteenth-century military-colonial organization sought to compromise with traditional village structures, including lower level Islamic officials, in an attempt to build local alliances against the resurgence of an Islamic expansionist ideology, such as muridism had supplied.

Yet despite these concessions, rebellion continued in the second half of the nineteenth century. Revolts broke out in various parts of Dagestan in 1861, in 1862, and in 1866. A widespread revolt began in 1871, when Gadzhi-Magomed, from the Avar village of Sogratle, was elected Dagestan’s fourth imam. The revolt was ruthlessly suppressed. Gallows were erected in Derbent and Gunib, where about 300 leaders of the resistance, including Dagestan’s foremost religious leaders, were hung in front of thousands of people who had been specially chosen to represent their djamaats as witnesses. About 5,000 people, including children and the elderly, were exiled to remote regions of Russia. During the Russo-Turkish War, 1877–78, Dagestanis and Chechens nevertheless joined forces once again against Imperial Russia.

On the eve of World War I, Dagestan saw a powerful protest movement known as the “opposition to the introduction of Cyrillic characters into the written language.” All village records had previously been kept by kadis in Arabic. Inevitably, this proved unacceptable to the tsar’s administration. Numerous programs were introduced to replace the Arabic language with Russian. Finally, in 1913 a formal edict was signed. Record books in Arabic were confiscated from the kadis, who were released from their duties. New Russian-speaking clerks were appointed, whose salaries were to be paid by the djamaats. Tensions brewed over a period of several months. By the autumn of that year, deputations from various parts of Dagestan were arriving at the provincial administration in Derbent, all of whom requested a reversal of the edict. The envoys were arrested and the organizers of the protest were repressed. In February and March 1914, mass resistance had begun in some regions of Dagestan, and by that summer the entire province was enveloped in protest. The officials backed down, agreeing to postpone the reform. It was canceled after the beginning of the war.

The “military-people’s” administration in Dagestan was intended to be a temporary and transitional measure when it was introduced in 1861. However, every time that the question of a civil government was raised, the corrupt Caucasian administration found a reason to extend its “temporary order.” Colonial in its essence, the local regime was nevertheless preserved until the fall of tsarism.

Revolutions and the Resurgence of Islamic Organization

The reforms of the February revolution of 1917 did not reach Dagestan immediately. Up to April 1917, the administration of the military governor continued to function. Since the life of the majority of the population remained traditionally parochial and interior to the djamaats, and since only a thin layer of well-to-do, European-educated Dagestanis participated in political affairs, the regime change was of little interest to most of the locals.

Having been liberated from feudal and bureaucratic controls, life in the djamaats gradually began to return to traditional forms of self-governance. The process was not without serious intra-djamaat conflicts, though these remained localized. The role of the Islamic clergy was definitive in these processes. During the years in which the tsarist regime had sought to limit their influence, the kadis, mullahs, sheikhs, and ulema had managed to preserve their authority among the people of their djamaats. Indeed the discourse of the local political class was saturated with Islamic values.

During the course of growing democratic and revolutionary agitation in tsarist Russia, the importance of Islam in Dagestan was enhanced. According to the

census of 1897, there were 571,154 people in Dagestan. Of these, 52,826 were literate, and over 75 percent of these, nearly 40,000 people, could read Arabic. By 1904, Dagestan had 685 Islamic schools³¹ with a total of 5,118 students. Ten years later in 1914, there were 743 *maktabs* (mosque schools for younger pupils) and *madrassas* with over 7,000 students.³² The Mavraev publishing house, which opened in 1903 in Temir-Khan Shura,³³ published large editions of the Koran, as well as more than 100 other religious titles, authored by Dagestani ulema in the Arabic language. More Islamic spiritual literature was published by Mikhailov publishing house in Port Petrovsk (now Makhachkala), as well as in Baku, Bakhchisarai, Simferopol, and other cities.³⁴

In 1917, on the eve of the revolution, Dagestan had only 183 secular schools with 13,000 students. Yet there were 2,311 *maktabs* and 400 more *madrassas*, where 45,000 students studied under about 2,500 teachers. There were more than 1,700 mosques.³⁵ In May 1917, Dagestanis were well-represented at the First Convention of Muslims of Russia.

In the preceding month, Islamic societies had been organized in Temir-Khan Shura, Port Petrovsk, and Derbent. On April 15, an all-Caucasian convention of Muslims convened in Baku. From out of this convention emerged two Islamic political organizations, one for the South Caucasus and one for the North Caucasus.

The Union of Allied Mountaineers of the North Caucasus (*Soiuz ob" edinennykh gortsev severnogo kavkaza*), or UAM, was an inclusive movement embracing highlanders from across the region. The movement held its first congress on May 1, 1917, in Vladikavkaz. It was intended to provide spiritual guidance for the Muslims throughout the mountains, and soon vowed to institute sharia at the foundation of the judicial system. Among the leaders of the organization was Nazhmuddin Gozinskii, an ethnic Avar, who later assumed the title of Mufti of Dagestan and the North Caucasus. Its leadership was drawn primarily from the pool of North Caucasians with advanced Russian educations or with Russian bureaucratic experience. Yet when the organization held conferences at Vladikavkaz, Andi,³⁶ and other locations, it also demonstrated substantial popular support.³⁷

This was because the UAM attempted to transcend the divisions of ethnicity, religion, and language by focusing upon the highland culture that encompassed all of the indigenous peoples of the North Caucasus. The organization attempted to cooperate with Orthodox Christian Cossacks alongside peoples against whom the Cossacks had fought for centuries. The UAM's leadership recognized the demographic challenge that inward migration presented to all of the small Caucasian groups, and attempted to forge a common strategy for their survival.³⁸

This UAM envisioned the successful integration of the North Caucasus

into a democratic Russian society. While the UAM rejected the autocratic abuses of the tsarist administration, and while it honored Imam Shamil, it also sought to locate itself within a rapidly changing Russia by drawing a sharp distinction between the monarchy and the Russian people, and looking toward cooperation with the latter. According to Reynolds:

The UAM leadership saw Russia not merely as a source of oppression, but also as a window to the advanced societies of Europe and the wider world. They were products of Russian education, and though fierce patriots and partisans of the Caucasus, they understood the benefits their people stood to gain through inclusion in a single state with Russia. Integration with Russia offered access to education, technology, and other aspects of modernity that the mountaineers needed if they were to develop into a prosperous society. . . . Russia's colonial adventure had not been a total failure, and had even produced a class of mountaineer patriots that identified the best interests of their people with remaining part of Russia.³⁹

Thus, in 1917, the revolutionary uprising in Petrograd undermined Russia's colonial organization in the south. The temporary decline of the Russian Empire created opportunities for the resurgence of local and indigenous, as well as Islamic, structures. In response to this resurgence of traditional North Caucasian social fragmentation, the UAM was a regional organization that recognized the need to transcend traditional ethnic and religious structures, in order to reach a compromise between the latter and a rapidly transforming Russian society. As a regional organization, it sought to mediate the vertical organization of the late Russian Empire in order to provide a sphere of regional autonomy conducive to economic preservation and local social practices.